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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 05 MADRID 001914

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FROM AMBASSADOR AGUIRRE FOR  
STATE FOR EUR, EUR/WE, S/CT, CA/EX, DS/DSS, AND DS/OP/EUR  
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/02/2017  
TAGS: [PTER](#) [SNAR](#) [SP](#)  
SUBJECT: SPAIN/CT: PROPOSAL TO CREATE A SOUTHERN EUROPEAN  
LAW ENFORCEMENT, COUNTERTERRORISM, AND REGIONAL  
INTELLIGENCE HUB IN BARCELONA

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Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Hugo Llorens for Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

[1](#)1. (S/NF) SUMMARY. In order to confront the sustained terrorist threat to the United States and our European allies, we must find innovative, flexible and proactive approaches to strengthen the effectiveness of international cooperation in the fight against terrorism. My Mission inter-agency team has held extensive discussions of prevailing threat levels in Europe and Spain's role in the collective security scheme of Europe and the western Mediterranean and believes that the creation of a counterterrorism and law enforcement hub in Barcelona would significantly bolster US regional capabilities. Specifically, we propose that our Consulate General in Barcelona become the platform for a multi-agency, jointly-coordinated counterterrorism, anti-crime, and intelligence center to work with our Spanish hosts in combating the target-rich environment of terrorist and criminal activities centered in the region. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (S/NF) Spain is a past and current al-Qaeda target and a critical player in US-EU counterterrorism efforts, due to its close proximity to the Maghreb and the presence of over 1 million Muslims. Mission Spain's Country Team strategy has been to develop a two-nation, multi-agency approach to confront the terrorist threat in all its aspects. We leverage the human and organizational resources, in addition to intelligence capabilities, of relevant US and Spanish law enforcement agencies as we increasingly recognize and combat the links between terrorist networks and criminals involved in the contraband of goods, drug trafficking, money laundering, human smuggling, and document falsification. Our approach is to maximize our resource allocation by ensuring that all Mission elements have a role to play in working with our Spanish hosts in the fight against terror and crime.

[1](#)3. (U) Barcelona is the capital of the region Catalonia and a city of approximately 1.6 million people located on the

Mediterranean Sea in northeastern Spain. Situated just below France's southern border, the inhabitants of Spain's second city have historically believed themselves to be different culturally from the rest of Spain; a crossroads of languages, cultures, and history. Barcelona has become one of Europe's premier cities (sealed during its successful hosting of the 1992 Summer Olympic Games), but also a haven for illicit activities that threaten our interests.

//BARCELONA: PROFILE OF THE RISING THREAT//

14. (C) Large Muslim Population Susceptible to Jihadist Recruitment: As a result of increased monitoring of radical Islamist activity since the March 11, 2004 train bombings in Madrid perpetrated by al-Qaeda affiliates in Spain and the Maghreb, Spanish and US authorities have identified Catalonia as a major Mediterranean center of radical Islamist activity. In February 2007, a suspected al-Qaeda operative was arrested near Barcelona and charged with recruiting new members for a terrorist cell based in North Africa. Three months later, authorities detained 11 more suspected Islamist extremist terrorists in and around Barcelona, including at least one purported imam. These individuals had false documents, large sums of cash, and multiple mobile phones, and Spanish police say their aim was to recruit terrorists for attacks in Iraq and Afghanistan. Spanish media reported in July 2007 that the Iraqi terrorist group Ansar al-Islam had established a recruiting cell in Catalonia to route would-be suicide bombers through a terrorist pipeline to Iraq.

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15. (C) Heavy immigration - both legal and illegal - from North Africa (Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria) and Southeast Asia (Pakistan and Bangladesh) has made this region a magnet for terrorist recruiters. The Spanish National Police estimates that there may be upwards of 60,000 Pakistanis living in Barcelona and the surrounding area; the vast majority are male, unmarried or unaccompanied, and without legal documentation. There are even more such immigrants from North Africa. Once here, they share a similar fate: they live on the edges of Spanish society, they do not speak the language, they are often unemployed, and they have very few places to practice their religion with dignity. Individually, these circumstances would provide fertile ground for terrorist recruitment; taken together, the threat is clear. In light of recent suspected activity, there is little doubt that the autonomous region of Catalonia has become a prime base of operations for terrorist activity. Spanish authorities tell us they fear the threat from these atomized immigrant communities prone to radicalism, but they have very little intelligence on or ability to penetrate these groups.

16. (C) Drug Traffickers, Money Launderers Gravitate to the Region: Drug use is on the rise all across Spain, but particularly in Catalonia. Spain remains the principal entry and transshipment zone for the large quantities of South American cocaine, Moroccan cannabis, and Afghan heroin destined for Spanish and European Union consumer markets. Spain is also a major source and transit location for drug proceeds returning to South and Central America. A recent report by the US Department of the Treasury notes that Spain is the European base where drug traffickers start the process of cleansing their cash proceeds. US and Spanish officials consider Barcelona to be a key operational base for distribution and financing for Colombia's cocaine cartels. These drug traffickers view the region as a hospitable environment and increasingly ply their trade in and around Barcelona. Spanish authorities are having trouble following the flow of illegal drugs and laundered money through this region, but believe that cartels have established interconnected groups of front companies and continuously changing bank accounts to pass of drug money as legitimate earnings. ICE Madrid has conducted several recent investigations involving money launderers who are conducting

business for the purpose of laundering illicit proceeds in Catalonia. These individuals represent various ethnic groups and nationalities, reinforcing the region's magnetic effect on nefarious activity.

¶17. (C) Trafficking in Persons and Illegal Smuggling: Spain remains both a transit and destination country for internationally trafficked persons, primarily women trafficked for prostitution, and we are seeing increasing incidences of trafficking based in Catalonia. The Department of Homeland Security reported that the Barcelona airport has seen an increase in the number of trafficking victims passing through in recent months. Spanish authorities tell us that Chinese, Romanian, and Kosovar-Albanian mafias have settled in Catalonia and spread down the Mediterranean coast in recent years, and continue to gain strength. These groups use their military training and criminal expertise to run prostitution rings, and Spanish authorities do not have a complete grasp of the entire spectrum of the mafias' activities. ICE Madrid has worked closely with the Spanish National Police to disrupt a child pornography ring run by a Russian criminal organization based in Catalonia.

¶18. (S/NF) Organized Crime and Counterfeiting: The Spanish government is at the forefront of European and global efforts

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to combat organized crime. Major crime groups made up of Russians, Ukrainians, and Lithuanians have set up shop along Spain's eastern coast; including Barcelona, Tarragona, and Valencia. Most Chinese organized crime is located in Barcelona, and to a lesser extent Valencia. Spanish authorities have had a string of operational successes against some of these groups, but remain challenged to cope with the magnitude of the problem, and key organized crime figures and groups continue to operate in Spain. Counterfeit euro and US dollar bills are increasingly manufactured in and passed through Spain. Catalonia, the Balearic Islands, and nearby Andorra are prime areas for this illicit movement. More than 25% of the EU's 500-euro notes are found along Spain's eastern coast, where they are presumably used in large-scale drug and money transactions. In addition, our Mission agencies have to focus more on credit card fraud perpetrated by a web of diversified criminal organizations, often comprised of immigrant communities in Catalonia.

¶19. (C) Port Security: The Container Security Initiative (CSI) team is at full strength and working with Port of Barcelona officials to screen US-bound shipments before they leave port. The port is one of Europe's busiest, facilitating shipping throughout the Mediterranean. In June 2007, CSI Algeciras seized a large shipment of weapons (many of them stolen and with their serial numbers scratched off), reportedly destined for Nicaragua by way of Puerto Rico. Spanish authorities recently have seized many cocaine-laden containers in the Port of Barcelona. Our CSI colleagues believe the seaports along Spain's eastern Mediterranean coastline will see an increase in the amount of cargo passing through, and US and Spanish authorities will be further challenged to detect illegal contraband.

//LEVERAGING SUBSTANTIAL SPANISH ASSETS//

¶10. (S/NF) The presence of a highly professional inter-agency team working out of our Consulate General in Barcelona would help leverage the substantial resources and expertise of Spanish and regional authorities in a more focused campaign, and serve as a force multiplier for our joint fight. The hub concept can also serve as a potential model of how we can work with our European allies in common purpose on law enforcement, security, and intelligence initiatives away from the more bureaucratic and politicized world of capital cities. Certainly, the Spanish government has been focused on terrorism for almost 40 years due to its struggles against the Basque terrorist group ETA. Since March 11, 2004, Spain has also actively worked to counter the threat from Islamic

extremism. The Spanish political class is gradually waking up to the amorphous threat represented by the nexus of terrorism, crime, and drug trafficking, and would likely look favorably on our proposal. On a regional and local level, Catalan security forces have substantial capabilities and would welcome the opportunity to increase the depth and breadth of CT and law enforcement cooperation with the US. However, we would have to carefully broach this hub concept with the central Spanish government, who may be wary of ceding more authority and responsibility to Catalonia. CG Barcelona has maintained excellent contacts with the Spanish National Police, Civil Guard, Mossos d'Esquadra (Catalan security force) and Barcelona Police, but these contacts could and should be put to better use by the on-the-ground presence of the agencies with greater experience that could dedicate more focused day-to-day interaction with the key players in the region. Embassy Madrid has established extensive bilateral contact with the Spanish government on issues of counterterrorism and law enforcement, but the USG now needs a regional approach that extends our focus and

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reach into the entire western Mediterranean.

//OUR PROPOSAL//

11. (S/NF) Under the direction of the Deputy Chief of Mission and co-coordinated with the CG Barcelona, we reached out to the relevant agencies and sections in Mission Spain and came to agreement on the minimal structure and level of resources needed to get the hub up and running and provide the basis of an effective multi-agency and jointly-coordinated center. As this concept moves forward, we will fine tune staffing as required. We also will analyze ways to pool ICASS resources between the USG agencies represented to minimize the number of support staff needed. The Principal Officer in Barcelona would lead the center and would report to the Ambassador through the DCM. Each Assistant Attache would also report to their respective agency and section heads in Madrid, who would maintain traditional contact with their home agency headquarters in Washington.

LEGAT - Assistant Legal Attache and one OMS support staff. The ALAT would focus liaison efforts with the Mossos d'Esquadra, who have the most significant law enforcement presence in the region. This ALAT would enhance the effectiveness of the Madrid LEGAT office, coordinating operations in the Catalonia region. The FBI's regional responsibilities would include counterterrorism, cyber-based attacks and high technology crimes, transnational organized crime as well as law enforcement training.

ICE/CBP/CSI - Assistant ICE/CBP Attache, who would serve as the senior DHS representative in the consular district and would supervise CSI operations in Barcelona and Valencia. In addition, the representative would work with TSA to monitor flights departing Barcelona for the US.

GRPO - One senior officer to work directly with Spanish counterparts in Barcelona and the surrounding area, and possibly one additional officer in a support capacity.

DEA - A Regional Agent in Charge (RAC) plus one special agent to provide expertise and assistance to foreign agencies on narcotics and dangerous drug enforcement and control programs. The RAC would also participate in investigations of international illicit drug trafficking and would develop and report on tactical and strategic intelligence.

USSS - Assistant Attache to work counterfeit US currency, credit card fraud, cyber crimes and traditional protective duties. Additionally, the Attache would assist other law enforcement agencies by coordinating financial crimes intelligence information available to them through our

relationships with local and regional financial institutions.

ICASS/Management/PAO - One associate management officer, one communications officer, and one LES support. The Public Affairs Officer in Barcelona would deal primarily with hub-related activities and strengthen our engagement with local Muslim communities to help counter the extremist messages reaching susceptible audiences.

RSO - One RSO, one OMS, and one LES investigator to work as senior security staff for the consulate, represent the lead agency on visa and passport fraud, and assist the American Citizen Services unit with US victims of crime. The RSO would also direct residential security, law enforcement liaison, and local guard programs in Barcelona and monitor

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the proper storage of classified information. The LES investigator would maintain liaison with all local and regional forces on matters related to Mission security.

//WHY THE CONSULATE?//

¶12. (S/NF) The threat in Catalonia is clear. Barcelona has become a crossroads of worrisome activities, a natural meeting place and transit point of people and goods moving to and through the region from all countries bordering the western Mediterranean. The US needs an on-site ability to quickly see who and what is passing through the area from places such as Algiers, Tunis, Rabat, and the south of France. The Consulate General in Barcelona would be the ideal platform for the hub because it has the space available, secure communications and a prime location.

¶13. (S/NF) COMMENT: The hub concept is a field-driven strategic proposal to counter, disrupt, and eliminate terrorist and organized crime networks that cross national borders by breaking down regional stovepipes within USG departments and agencies. This center would also build host nation cooperation and capacity to address transnational threats, focusing on the entire western Mediterranean region. Catalonia has become a key theater of operation for those who would threaten our interests and national security, and the complex and evolving threat requires flexible interaction among the entire Country Team; a challenge that the hub would meet head-on. END COMMENT.  
LLORENS